

A THEOLOGICAL CONVERSATION WITH TWO SEX EDUCATION  
PROGRAMS FOR THE CHURCH

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the Faculty of the School of Theology  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Doctor of Ministry

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by  
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## ABSTRACT

The two courses used for this work are the Unitarian (calderwood, 1971) and the Southern California United Methodist (Task Force, 1973). The first chapter describes the courses and highlights implicit and explicit theological presuppositions.

The second chapter applies Reinhold Niebuhr's ethical system to sexual behavior. Sexuality as incorporated into the unity of the human self participates in all the aspects of selfhood, and is an expression of it. As such it must not be separately considered as a special case of human behavior, but rather is under the same demand of agape as all other acts. Mutuality and justice are the provisional norms of agape for human life.

Chapter three discusses similarities and differences between the courses. A dialog is constructed among the positions of the courses and that of chapter two. Areas of agreement are integration of sexual behavior into the total personality, and the goodness of sexuality. Misuses and problems lack serious consideration in the courses, particularly the Unitarian. Specific expressions are acknowledged and dealt with in the Unitarian, much less in the Methodist course. Responsible decision-making must include more input than is indicated in either course. The issue of consequences of sexual behaviors is more complex than

acknowledged by either; some issues are illustrated. The best church sex education would be a combination of the best characteristics of both of these courses.

## PREFACE

This work will analyze the sex education curriculum resources provided for two groups of churches: United Methodist, and Unitarian Universalist. Analysis will be concerned primarily with the theological presuppositions (explicit or implied) upon which the programs are based. The analysis will include an overview of the actual plans and supporting documents, with enough detail to indicate important consequences of, or contradictions to these presuppositions. My position will be developed from certain theological insights of Reinhold Niebuhr. The dialog of the final chapter will include important similarities and differences in the programs and consideration of the consistency of each program's approach with its purposes and presuppositions as I see them.

An interest in human sexuality has provided an interesting focal point for my theological training over the past few years. Several papers on sexual ethics, concepts of sexuality, and history of marriage ceremonies have been written. They have added color and present interest to sometimes dull and "academic" discussions. But they have also provided a very practical, timely point of view from which to investigate the implications of such subjects as soteriology, ethical decision-making, educational

methodology and the nature of human existence and selfhood. Obviously, these studies have informed my formulation of the questions asked of sex education and my approach to the following dialog. However, the positions studied and readings which have informed my thinking to this point will not be directly used or acknowledged.

When a Christian asks about the place of sex in the life of a believer, many questions can arise, ranging from the unnecessarily troubling to those so profound as to go to the very roots of the faith itself. For example, the former seems well-represented by, Are certain positions for coitus "Christian" (or "unnatural," "perverted")? Or, How many times can one make love and still be Christian? Examples of the latter category might include, Is the "wholeness" promised in the faith a present reality? If so, in what way: How is sexual behavior changed if one is made whole? Is indeed everything permitted? Or is coitus prohibited or limited by love of things of the spirit?

When a Christian is concerned about communicating to younger members of the community of faith not only the "facts" of sexuality but also its place in one's life, other kinds of questions arise. What is the purpose of sex education? How is the subject best explained and integrated into Christian education? What is the best way to enable meaningful exploration of the issues by those participating in sex education in the church?



A major purpose for this paper is to attempt to justify the use of a particular program or methodology based on values and ethical norms developed from a particular viewpoint. The purpose of the dialog is not to presume final or universal judgment, but to show to those who might share many of these values the relative merit of these two programs for their needs.

## Chapter I

### DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSES

#### UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION<sup>1</sup>

##### Background and Development

This program is the result of work initiated "a number of years ago" by the staff of the Department of Education and Social Concern in response to "numerous inquiries about what materials dealing with human sexuality were available for use with junior high young people in liberal churches and fellowships."<sup>2</sup> It is the first material provided by the Association on the subject.

A search of available materials was made at the outset, both of religious and secular natures. The results of this search were not satisfying nor were the materials found adequate in the judgment of the staff of the Department. There was much published on anatomy, conception, birth control, and venereal disease. But these materials were "strangely silent about very basic and normal expressions of sexuality," or they were "moralistically

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<sup>1</sup>deryck calderwood [sic] About Your Sexuality (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

<sup>2</sup>"About the Program," p. v.

judgmental and exceedingly negative." The convictions which informed these judgments were

that sex is a positive and enriching force in life, that some expression of it is normal and to be expected at all age levels, and that there is no one right norm of sexual behavior for all people.<sup>3</sup>

Experience with youth indicated that there was a need for situations in which the young could get help "in clarifying the many questions and puzzlements they have about their own sexuality." The staff felt that the silence of the society and the lack of meaningful intergenerational discussion had led to inadequate or faulty information and much "anguish" in the clarification of values and decision-making for young people.

The Department staff gathered together a team of people who "had worked extensively with young people in the area of education for human sexuality." This team met every three months over a period of 18 months, each team member developing "individual assignments" between meetings. At the end of the development period, the program was tested with about 25 UUA church groups. Each group provided two teachers who attended three-day orientations to become familiar with program goals, teaching procedures, and materials. This statement reveals much more than simply the orientation procedure:

Since our method of orientation involved using the

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

materials with the teachers as teachers were to use them with young people, we quickly found that the program was as engaging and vital for adults as we had imagined it for young people.<sup>4</sup>

Teachers continued preparations after orientation and then "used the program with a group of local junior high school students over a period of seven months." Weekly evaluations were sent to the team and a three-day evaluation midway through the test was held with the team.

#### Purpose and Methodology

The intent of the Unitarian program was not simply to reject the silent method and impose everything about sex on the young, for this also represents "the adult deciding what is good for the young people to know."

The intent of this program is to provide a setting where young people can openly and honestly bring their own questions and puzzlements and find resources, both human and material, to feel and think them through.<sup>5</sup>

As Dr. calderwood puts it,

the focus of education for human sexuality [is] an ongoing dialogue and mutual process of exploration and discovery with children and youth about who they are and how they relate to others . . .<sup>6</sup>

This process involves four parts: "getting accurate information, developing communication skills, building attitudes and values and making responsible decisions

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. vi.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

concerning sexual behavior."<sup>7</sup> To put the purpose of the program in yet another way, this statement also indicates roughly the educational methodology:

Beginning with the questions which the young people themselves bring to the program, the materials of this program will help young people to explore, according to their interest rather than in a predetermined prescribed order, the facts, feelings, attitudes, and values they must take into consideration in order to understand their own sexuality and to be responsible decision-makers in this area of their lives.<sup>8</sup>

The most important word for the methodology is dialogic. This is education which is learner-centered, which assumes that learning occurs best when it is motivated out of a sense of needs. It is education which is dialogic and mutual, between learner and learner, learner and teacher. It is exploratory, trying out and discussing and discovering new facts which shed new light on one's perceived need. Most important, it is education that is "about who they are" as persons and "how they relate to others."

This method does not assume that the teacher is an authority-figure, though the teacher must have "accurate authoritative information."<sup>9</sup> It does not let the teacher be a fact-giver but encourages the role of stimulator of discussion and interaction, enabler.<sup>10</sup>

The methodology of the course outline is consistent

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 24, 22. <sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 27, 17, 18.

with these presuppositions. The opening sessions are designed to develop the subject order for a course tailored to the needs of the youth as they perceive them. The individual units are organized around a general four-stage pattern, which, if skillfully used, can involve students deeply in a maximal way.

The four stages of this model are: initiation, interaction, investigation, internalization. The first stage builds motivation for learning by the teacher focusing attention and stimulating thinking on the subject. "Inventories, games, visual aids, readings, records, and role-playing" are used.<sup>11</sup>

The second stage aims at "as much interaction as possible among the students"--not only student-teacher exchanges. Developing communication skills between peers and with adults about sexuality is the goal.

In the investigation stage the group decides what knowledge is still desired, and in what order. Gathering it and exploring its significance are also important parts of this stage.<sup>12</sup>

The fourth stage, internalization, summarizes and evaluates what has been learned. Implications of new knowledge and attitudes for "personal behavior and relationships" are explored.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 17.    <sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 18.    <sup>13</sup>Ibid.

The teacher is an active participant in the process, moving from stimulator, discussion leader, to enabler and confronter.

The program was designed for use with young people 12-14, grades 7-9, but others who are older and who have not had a program similar to this would benefit, as would a lot of adults, in my opinion.<sup>14</sup>

#### Description of Contents

The program contains a wealth of material--the list is included here. It sells for about \$120 to non-Unitarian users and comes packaged in a box approximately 12 x 9 x 5 inches, intended to be a permanent storage box.

#### List of Materials Included With the Program

##### Teacher's Guides

- "About the Program"
- "How to Begin the Program"
- "Birth Control"
- "Femininity and Masculinity"
- "Love Making"
- "Making Out"
- "Male and Female Anatomy"
- "Masturbation"
- "Same-Sex Behavior"
- "Conception and Childbirth"
- "Venereal Disease"

##### Core Library

Broderick and Bernard, The Individual, Sex, and Society<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>15</sup>Carlfred B. Broderick and Jessie Bernard (eds.) The Individual, Sex, and Society (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969).

Pomeroy, Boys and Sex<sup>16</sup>  
 Pomeroy, Girls and Sex<sup>17</sup>

Student Activity Booklet Package, 20 booklets, containing:

"Typical Questions from Junior High Boys About Sex"  
 "Typical Questions from Junior High Girls About Sex"  
 "Sex Concerns Checklist (Male)"  
 "Sex Concerns Checklist (Female)"  
 "Reaction to Pictures"  
 "Good Friend--In Private--In Public"  
 "Male Sexual Organs"  
 "Female Sexual Organs"  
 "Computer Match-Mate Personality Chart"  
 "Personal Sexual Experience (Male)"  
 "Personal Sexual Experience (Female)"  
 "I'll Get Married Only if They Change the Laws"

#### Filmstrips

"Learning About Sex," with accompanying record  
 "Breaking the Language Barrier"  
 "Male and Female Anatomy"  
 "Love Making"  
 "Four Sequences"  
     "Birth Control"  
     "Conception and Childbirth"  
     "Masturbation"  
     "Same Sex Behavior"

#### Records

"Learning About Sex"  
 "Mike," "Jack Baker"  
 "Eddie (2)," "Ann"  
 "John," "Gail"  
 "Cindy," "Eddie"/"Beth," "Steven," "Glen"

#### Pamphlets

What Everyone Should Know About V.D.<sup>18</sup>  
The How-Not-To-Book<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Wardell B. Pomeroy, Boys and Sex (New York: Delacorte Press, 1968).

<sup>17</sup>Wardell B. Pomeroy, Girls and Sex (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969).

<sup>18</sup>What Everyone Should Know About V.D. (Greenfield, MA: Bete, 1971).

<sup>19</sup>The How-Not-To-Book (New York: Julius Schmid Pharmaceuticals, n.d.)



Birth Control Handbook<sup>20</sup>  
Life Before Birth reprint<sup>21</sup>  
"Teacher's Guide" to Life Before Birth<sup>22</sup>

Other Materials

"Homosexual Bill of Rights"<sup>23</sup>  
 Photo Cards of Young People  
 Introductory Notes

The "Core Library" is a set of three books designed to give both "up-to-date authoritative background materials"<sup>24</sup> and, for the teacher, "an immediate feeling for the honest approach to young people that is expected of him throughout the course."<sup>25</sup> Background readings are found in a Sex Information and Education Council in the U. S. handbook, The Individual, Sex and Society, edited by Carlfred B. Broderick and Jessie Bernard. Chapters recommended include Kirkendall and Libby on "Trends in Sex Education," Esther Middlewood's "Sex Education in the Community," "Normal Sociosexual Development" by Broderick, articles on values and standards from premarital sex (Reiss) to masculinity/femininity concepts (Foote), Melton's "Human Sexual

<sup>20</sup>Donna Cherniak and Allan Feingold (eds.) Birth Control Handbook (5th ed.; Montreal: Students Society of McGill University, 1970).

<sup>21</sup>Life Before Birth, Life Educational Reprint No. 27 (Life, April 30, 1965; New York: Life Educational Reprint Program, 1965).

<sup>22</sup>Kenneth Bobrowsky, "Teacher's Guide," Life Before Birth (New York: Life Educational Reprint Program, 1965).

<sup>23</sup>A Homosexual Bill of Rights (San Francisco: Society for Individual Rights, n.d.)

<sup>24</sup>"About the Program," p. ix.      <sup>25</sup>Ibid.

Response," and masturbation (W. R. Johnson). Chapters on poverty (Rainwater) and ghetto living (Hammond and Lodner) are not named explicitly as recommended, but certainly come under the blanket recommendations of the curriculum writers.

Two other books, both by Wardell B. Pomeroy (close Kinsey associate), complete the "Core Library." They are Boys and Sex and Girls and Sex. Both are written in clear, conversational style. The author never addresses the reader as "you"--the address is always in the third person. The attempt is to be as straightforward and unpretentious as possible while respecting the personhood of the reader. The chapters deal with one's sex life in general, anatomy, early sexual experiences, masturbation, homosexuality, dating, petting, intercourse and its consequences, and the female orgasm. It is not stated that these books are to be handed out, though this is certainly an option. The books are primarily intended to set a strong example for the teacher of the way the subject is intended to be approached.

The teachers guides will be described in some detail, as they are the heart of the course.

The first teacher's guide, entitled "About the Program," is 85 pages long. The Preface includes an explanation "Why and how this program was developed" (much of which was used above), and "Preparing to use this program," a short overview of materials and ways to prepare for its use. This Preface was written by Hugo Hollerorth,

Curriculum Editor of the Department of Education and Social Concern. A list of "members of the program development team" includes the "major writer" deryck calderwood<sup>26</sup> and ten other experienced educators. The 23 Unitarian fellowships which participated in the field test are also listed.

The section entitled "Introductory Material for the Leader" constitutes the main body of the booklet, and was most likely largely written by calderwood. Its contents in rough outline:

- A. "What is education for human sexuality?"
  - 1. "Getting accurate information"
  - 2. "Developing communication skills"
  - 3. "Building attitudes and values"
  - 4. "Making responsible decisions"
- B. "The Church's role"
- C. "Characteristics of the target audience"
- D. "Methodology: the model"
- E. "Preparation for the program"
  - 1. "The institution"
  - 2. "Parents and other adults"
  - 3. "The students"
  - 4. "The teacher"
- F. "Practical hints for the teacher"
  - 1. "Arrangement of meeting place, size of group, time of meeting"
  - 2. "The use of the units"
  - 3. "What to expect from the young people"
  - 4. "The role of the teacher"

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<sup>26</sup>calderwood is an Educational Consultant in Family Life and Sex Education, Summit, NJ.

An appendix follows and includes

- 1) Outlines for a one-session introduction for parents and an eight-session use of the material with parents and/or adults in general.
- 2) The text of the filmstrip "Breaking the Language Barrier"
- 3) "Typical questions from junior high boys about sex"
- 4) "Typical questions from junior high girls about sex"
- 5) "Checklist of attitudes toward aspects of human sexuality" (questionnaire)
- 6) "Communicating with youth about sexuality" (subject-ranking questionnaire)
- 7) "Reaction to pictures" (ranking form)
- 8) "Range of experience with sexual outlets" (questionnaire) Married and unmarried forms
- 9) "Annotated selection of [57] basic paperbacks on sexuality"
- 10) "Works cited"

Brief descriptions of the opening sessions guide and the nine subject guides are given on the next few pages. It should be remembered that the units are not designed to be done one per session, but over a period of "three to six sessions."<sup>27</sup>

"How to Begin the Program: the Introductory Sessions." The course opens with getting acquainted exercises to begin the development of trust and informality.

The Initiation Stage tries to establish "a frank,

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<sup>27</sup>"About the Program," p. x.

honest approach" with the teacher's introduction and the filmstrip "Learning About Sex." Basic information about the course is also given.

In the Interaction Stage, the teacher encourages discussion, questions, and reactions to what was presented. The interaction among the students is encouraged to reach some depth on the whole field of sexual relating and its place in society.

It is in the Investigation Stage that five of the nine subject areas are chosen and ranked. The process begins with student questions which are elicited through use of the "Sample Questions" forms. After two or three topics have been explored, it is suggested that the order be re-negotiated.

For the Internalization Stage, students are asked "to summarize how they think a study of each of the topics chosen will be of benefit to them."<sup>28</sup>

"Birth Control." This unit includes, for the teacher, a discussion of the availability of information on contraceptives and the pervasiveness of myth and partial knowledge. A detailed discussion on abortion is given for use in group discussion if needed.

In the Initiation Stage, students' information about various methods is gathered, listed, and categorized.

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<sup>28</sup>"How to Begin the Program," p. 4.

Questions are encouraged.

The Interaction Stage has students answering as many of their own questions as possible. Unanswered ones are saved.

Resources used in the Investigation Stage give information on all the common methods. The "Birth Control" filmstrip is shown, the Birth Control Handbook and The How-Not-To Book are made available. It is suggested that actual devices be present. If needed, it is suggested that professionals who can be matter-of-fact and honest are a possible resource.

In the Internalization Stage, the devices or their names are ranked by effectiveness and/or availability. Role-playing, group discussion and brainstorming encourage consideration of family planning and other reasons for use of contraception.

"Femininity and Masculinity." Sensitivity to sex roles and stereotypes is the most important goal of this unit.

The Initiation Stage uses the recording "A Boy Named Sue"<sup>29</sup> and the article "I'll Get Married Only If They Change the Laws"<sup>30</sup> to sensitize the group to influences upon them and expressions related to sex roles.

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<sup>29</sup>Rendition by Johnny Cash is recommended.

<sup>30</sup>Judy Stein, "Five Passionate Feminists: I'll Get Married Only If They Change the Laws," McCall's, XCVII (1970), 53f.

For the Interaction Stage, small groups are used to divide (supplied) adjectives and activities into "Feminine, Masculine, and Human" categories.

Investigation Stage: Dictionary definitions of masculine and feminine can be discussed. Or a "Last Twenty-four Hours Profile" of feelings and activities is used to highlight role differences and characteristics.

Internalization Stage: Students may make collages by vote and discussion, of magazine advertising which they like or dislike. Or charts can be made and shared, reflecting students' felt expectations from eight sources. A third option, contingent upon prior completion of the Love Making unit, uses the records for that unit for analyzing feminine-masculine stereotypes.

"Love Making." Value and attitude clarification, information, artistic expression and meaning of intercourse are the concerns of this unit.

The teacher is advised of the importance for young persons of realistic, frank information about sexual intercourse. The unit is carefully structured to gently but honestly open up the area.

The Initiation and Interaction Stages combine to promote interaction, sharing of feelings and clarification of attitudes. Recordings of contemporary songs dealing with feelings and thoughts about love making, or selected poetry

are used first. Then Part I of the "Love Making" filmstrip, containing visual artistic expressions, is shown twice. Selected recordings from the "first experiences . . . and other reflections" records provided are played. Comfortable, sensitive, honest communication is the goal.

The Investigation Stage uses small groups to decide what questions remain. The remaining parts of the filmstrip are shown, dealing with the four stages, and positions of intercourse. This unit, more than any other, stresses patience for the teacher, the importance of an unhurried approach, and sensitivity to feelings of the group.

Finally, in the Internalization Stage, students work out a "developmental outline indicating how much information about love making and intercourse they want to have their own children learn at each age."<sup>31</sup> Evaluation of the unit may be used for further exploration.

"Making Out." Reflection on personal preferences and local patterns of boy-girl relationships, touch as communication, development of skills in communicating feelings and attitudes on touching, and reflection about society's effect on attitudes towards touch--all are parts of this unit.

The teacher's note includes a definition of the term and stresses the centrality of touch in one's life and development.

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<sup>31</sup>"Love Making," p. 10.



The Initiation Stage can begin at one of two levels. The first deals with appearance, interests, traits that attract. The Computer Match Mate Personality Chart<sup>32</sup> may be filled out and then revised by the group for their age. Other cultures' patterns may be examined. Touching activities, games, and stories comprise the second level of activities.

The Interaction Stage focusses on reactions, stereotypes and the development of a continuum for touching in relationships, from least to most intimate expressions.

The Investigation Stage involves students answering their own questions and discussing their answers.

The Internalization Stage suggests an optional but sensitive and important activity, using the "Personal Sexual Experience Checklist," as a way of attaining a new level of honesty. The group can also role-play and discuss several decision-making situations.

"Male and Female Anatomy." This unit, like all the others, is to be chosen by the students, even though one of its objectives is "to demonstrate to students that there is much they do not know about their bodies." Accurate information about anatomy, including normal differences in size, shape and rate of development of sexual organs is given.

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<sup>32</sup>Computer Match Mate Personality Chart (Bridgeport, CN: Matchmaker, n.d.)

Discovery of "how knowledge of anatomy contributes to an understanding and enjoyment of one's sexuality," and the development of a healthy and comfortable acceptance of the nude body are also objectives.

In the Initiation and Interaction Stages, the filmstrip "Male and Female Anatomy" is used for the primary content. Group participation in filling out charts is the primary tool.

In the Investigation and Internalization Stages, sex-specific and mixed small groups are used to discuss further questions and answers. Questions are supplied the teacher if needed.

The filmstrip "Breaking the Language Barrier," dealing with slang terms, can also be used.

"Masturbation." The main concerns of this unit include exploration of feelings about the genitals and touching them, providing accurate information, and affirmation of the practice.

The teacher is given much material on the guilt that can come from masturbation and some of the less desirable behaviors used to avoid this guilt. Two long quotes are provided asserting the "positive and worthwhile" nature of the experience for young people.

The Initiation Stage uses the first frames of the "Masturbation" filmstrip sequence and three extremely

contrasting readings (1891-1969) to prime discussion of the change in the taboo.

In the Interaction Stage similarities and differences in male and female anatomy are shown using the filmstrip. Group effort and remaining filmstrip frames are used to answer questions.

The Investigation Stage uses a true-false inventory on myths and methods to generate further questions which are also dealt with.

The unit is reviewed in the Internalization Stage, emphasizing positive aspects of masturbation.

"Same-Sex Behavior." This unit is another sensitive area, along with the one on Love Making. Its viewpoint is very strong, and simply tells the teacher that condescending attitudes are "not appropriate." The unit assumes that homosexuality is behavior, not pathology. It distinguishes between exploratory and "a fixed exclusive adult homosexual orientation." The teacher is mandated to read the Core Library readings.

The Initiation Stage uses news articles and a reading supplied to stimulate "general discussion of attitudes and feelings about same-sex behavior." A two-part filmstrip is shown for reaction, the first part being close-up photos of examples of same-sex behavior. The second part is a more inclusive shot of the same behavior showing its context.

Differences in reactions are discussed. Forms showing two male and two female outlines are used to discover and reflect on the group's feelings and practices about touching a "Good Friend--In Private--In Public." Another option is an experimental same-sex walk in public to explore and reveal their reactions and those of others.

The Interaction Stage uses group effort again to answer questions raised so far.

The Investigation Stage uses the Kinsey sexual experience continuum to show that not all same-sex relations can be labelled homosexual. A book report, play or movie, supplied recording, visit by a homophile organization representative, and discussion of the "Homosexual Bill of Rights" are suggested options.

The Internalization Stage suggests creation of a similar unit for students two years younger.

"Conception and Childbirth." This unit lists resources available from other programs and sources, since "accurate and authoritative" materials already exist.

A filmstrip sequence is included in the program materials, as well as the Life Educational Reprint Life Before Birth.

The teacher is urged "not only to enlist the boys' interest, but to make it acceptable for them to pursue their interest and to express their doubts, fears, feelings and

expectations concerning their role in procreation and fatherhood."

"Venereal Disease." This unit, like the preceding one, suggests resources available from other sources. The booklet What Everyone Should Know About VD is included with the program. A list of states which "allow young people to be treated without parental consent" is also provided in this unit.

#### Theological Presuppositions

Explicit theological presuppositions, in a traditional sense at least, are not present in this material. However, the following demonstrates certain presuppositions which inform the writers and which also have significantly theological implications. It is not the purpose to interact with these at this point, but only to lift them out and clarify some of their implications as I see them. Some of these will be used as part of the concluding dialog.

Probably the primary underlying principle of this course is dialog and a "mutual process of exploration and discovery" with young persons "about who they are and how they relate to others."<sup>33</sup> Relationship and personal identity are of primary importance, and dialog and mutual exploration are the most important ways one can discover

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<sup>33</sup>"About the Program," p. 2.

these. It is put another way, also: "The task of the new generation is not so much learning how to be men and women as how to be human beings concerned with and caring for one another."<sup>34</sup> Involved in identity is the "integration of sexuality into the total personality." "The ability to honestly communicate one's feelings about sex" is also a part of how one relates to others. Responsibility in decision-making is a third goal of the writers, and another factor in relating to others.<sup>35</sup>

Another important assumption is the positive and enriching nature of the "force" of sex.<sup>36</sup> This is in contrast to a long history of cultural denial and repression of human sexual feelings and expression. This seems to be an increasingly accepted viewpoint, both in American culture and in Christian circles as well.

Closely related to this is the affirmation of some form of sexual expression at all ages.<sup>37</sup> A popular assumption has been that sexual expression does not really begin until puberty and does not last into old age. "Sexual outlet" is not really defined in the statement, yet it is clear from this statement that sexuality is considered to be a lifelong possession. Another way this basic view is

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<sup>34</sup>Eleanore Braun Luckey, "Changing Roles--Who Is Responsible?" Penney's Forum (Spring, Summer, 1969).

<sup>35</sup>"About the Program," p. 4.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 2.      <sup>37</sup>Ibid.

expressed concerns touching as "relating to, communicating with, and understanding each other." Touching is a physical relationship to another, upon which even one's conceptions of reality are dependent.<sup>38</sup> Masturbation is an example of one of the ways "sexual outlet" is expressed and "almost always contributes to our well-being" through "self-discovery."<sup>39</sup>

There is a great emphasis upon individuality. "The responsibility for the ultimate decision" in a difficult situation belongs "squarely . . . on the shoulders of the individual."<sup>40</sup> "Masturbation is a private act with personal meaning" upon which one can gain and keep "inner equilibrium and mental health." (This is such a contrast to the common exhortations of the earlier years of this century!) Masturbation also is a "healthy" alternative, when one is not "ready or able," to "loving sexuality."<sup>41</sup> There is a noticeable lack of content and resources related to any legitimate influence of community standards upon the individual's development and behavior. Community standards are approached as exploitative, when they are seriously

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<sup>38</sup>"Making Out," p. 1.

<sup>39</sup>"Masturbation," p. 3, quoting Ronald M. Mazur, Commonsense Sex (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), pp. 31-34.

<sup>40</sup>"About the Program," p. 6.

<sup>41</sup>"Masturbation," p. 3, quoting Mazur.

addressed.<sup>42</sup> The methodology, while dialogic and interactive, and thus inherently social, does not encourage reflection upon the interaction itself.

A fifth important presupposition is very closely related to the preceding one: "There are no automatic, inevitable physical or psychological consequences of any form of sexual behavior, but rather a wide range of possible outcomes."<sup>43</sup> Consequences of sexual behavior are seen primarily as physical and psychological; social consequences are not mentioned. Consequences are not automatic, pre-determined or inevitable; neither is there mention of consequences which, when paired with some situations, might be more probable than others. A brief example: Sexual intercourse with a prostitute when one is married might lead more probably to guilt than when it is with one's spouse. The last clause quoted simply affirms the wide range of meanings, reactions, and futures involved in given sexual expressions.

This last presupposition I have chosen is two-pronged:

Sexual behavior and its consequences are determined and conditioned by family background, concept of sex role, prior experience, geography, and opportunity to a much greater degree than by intellectualized presentation.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>"Femininity and Masculinity."

<sup>43</sup>"About the Program," p. 2.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.



The first emphasis is mainly the social context and its influence upon behavior and consequences; responsibility to one's community is certainly not emphasized. The second and primary emphasis of the statement is the lack of effectiveness of intellectualized "lecture" or content in determining behavior and consequences. This is a welcome corrective to the assumption that simple knowledge is enough to change beliefs and behavior. Of course, "reality" in the form of "newest findings and scientific facts" is an important source of information upon which to make decisions. Inventories, research, latest "authoritative information" are all indications of the basis of this "reality-oriented" sex education program.<sup>45</sup>

In summary, there are no moral absolutes, no inevitable consequences for given actions. Rather, consequences are determined by many things and can cover a wide range of possibilities. Varying expressions of sexual behavior are normal and simply "alternative life styles," not ultimately right or wrong.

Understanding, openness, honesty, trust, integration of the total personality, touch, self-discovery, partnership and dialog are all positive values--ethical principles, if you will. Individual responsibility is affirmed, as is

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<sup>45</sup>See "About the Program," pp. 3, 4, 11, 22; "Birth Control," p. 1; "Male and Female Anatomy," p. 1; "Same Sex Behavior," p. 5.

pleasure, both self-directed and other-directed. Throughout the course is a thread of sincere respect for young persons as persons, not as minds or personalities to be molded.

### Leadership Expectations

The first step in choosing a leader, the material suggests, is familiarity with--indeed, thorough knowledge of--the course and its objectives by the committee who makes the decision to have the course and administrative staff of the church.<sup>46</sup> As stated, "the key to the ultimate success . . . is the teacher." The course recommends "highly" that both a man and a woman teach the course together.

". . . the opportunity for young people to relate to and communicate with both a mature man and a mature woman will add an invaluable dimension to the program." Age and marital status are unimportant, "research and practical experience both confirm."<sup>47</sup> Hollerorth puts the requirement for teachers this way:

. . . each of them is appreciative of and comfortable with his own sexuality as well as comfortable with an open and honest approach to human sexuality with young people . . .<sup>48</sup>

As Kirkendall stated it,

What we need is not resources as much as teachers who know about life; the place of sex in it, who are at ease with themselves, who are ready to say, "I don't know,"

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<sup>46</sup>"About the Program," p. 19.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. ix.

to talk and to learn with pupils--and who have confidence that pupils are earnestly seeking and concerned.<sup>49</sup>

"Pre-service training sessions and regular in-service meetings . . . are important . . . preparation" but personal preparation by the teacher is the dominant factor. The teacher is urged to study carefully and thoroughly all materials in the course before teaching any part of it.<sup>50</sup> Sometimes the urging appears in large capital letters.<sup>51</sup>

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SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA<sup>52</sup>

Background and Development

In 1960, a long-established series of national youth conferences on "alcohol studies" included, for the first time, sex education. This two-sided concern was called the "Youth School on Moral Concerns," sponsored by two national boards of the United Methodist Church (Education, and Christian Social Concerns). The new emphasis was "so

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<sup>49</sup>"About the Program," p. 22, citing Lester A. Kirkendall, and others, A Proposal for a Task Force (Honolulu: Department of Budget and Finance, 1968).

<sup>50</sup>"About the Program," p. 22, ix, 24, 29; "Introductory Notes," p. 8.

<sup>51</sup>"About the Program," p. 24; "Same Sex Behavior."

<sup>52</sup>Task Group on Sex Education in the Christian Faith, Sexuality Plus (Los Angeles: Family Ministry Department, Southern California-Arizona Conference, United Methodist Church, 1973).

valuable that . . . an elective unit" in sex education was developed and used the following year. This course, called "Sex and the Whole Person," was used nationally, with a program of training for leaders accompanying it. (Recently, a new national-level course has been produced.<sup>53</sup>) The program was also successful and valuable in the Southern California area. A Task Force, begun in 1966, has modified the national course continually until August, 1973, when the "Sexuality Plus" program was finalized. This course is the result of the work of the Task Force on Sex Education in the Christian Faith of the Southern California United Methodist Church.<sup>54</sup>

#### Purpose

Though there is no one statement identified as the explicit purpose of the present course, a list of eleven "goals" is included. To summarize,

the learner may achieve  
 . . . an attitude favorable to open inquiry . . .  
 into sexuality  
 . . . understanding of, confidence and satisfaction  
 in one's role as a member of his own sex and understand-  
 ing of the roles of the opposite sex  
 . . . increased skill in communication  
 . . . understanding of sex as an integral part of

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<sup>53</sup>Ronald K. Johnson, Christians and the Meaning of Sexuality (Nashville: Graded Press, 1972).

<sup>54</sup>Task Group on Sex Education in the Christian Faith, Guidelines (Los Angeles: Family Ministry Department, Southern California-Arizona Conference, United Methodist Church, 1971), Section B, p. 2.

God's gift of life . . . affirming of one's own sexuality

. . . responsibility for making one's own decisions within one's ethical framework

. . . awareness of, and sensitivity to: sexual expression, attitudes about sexual expression, exploration of one's sexuality in our culture

. . . ability to affirm one's sexual being through a wide range of . . . experience

. . . understanding that to love and be loved is a growing process

. . . understanding and appreciation of different life styles and patterns of sex behavior

. . . familiarity with historical development of sex attitudes; beliefs and practices in biblical, Christian and western tradition.<sup>55</sup>

(The last two are covered by optional sessions.) These goals were not revised from the previous version of the course.

The purpose of the course is expressed in a more general way by a paper by Robert M. McCallister which is included with the course materials. A ministry with youth must include

the nurturing of wholesome attitudes toward sexuality, the realization of values inherent in sexual relationships, the provision for open and fully social considerations of information about sex anatomy, emotions related to sexuality, and the wholeness of human nature. . . .<sup>56</sup>

Put another way,

Christian sex education involves the reality oriented self-determination of individuals to move into relationships in a creative and responsible way.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Guidelines, B, p. 7.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., A, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

### Description of Contents

The course comes in two parts. The first is entitled "Guidelines; Sex Education in the Christian Faith," and the second, "Sexuality Plus; A Seminar for Senior Highs and Their Parents."

The Guidelines section is divided into three parts. The first includes a one-page introduction to an "abridged" paper on "The Place of Sex Education in Youth Ministry" by Robert M. McCallister. The second part, Section B, includes another introduction with historical background on the development of the course, "Some Basic Assumptions," goals for both junior high and senior high ("Sexuality Plus") courses, steps the local church must follow in planning, and description of "certified lead teacher" qualifications. Some "specimens" are also included illustrating all seven forms which must be filled out, faculty preparation ideas, sample schedules, check lists, report forms, etc. Section C provides "Course Promotional Aids" such as sample letters for recruitment, registration, and recommendations on style of recruiting.

The course material itself provides detailed outlines for three sessions, thirty options for use in two additional sessions, and six ideas for "Celebration," a kind of worship-meditation.

The course is referred to as a structured experience

of sex education;<sup>58</sup> three structured course schedules are provided.

The first part of Session I is designed to acquaint group members with each other and begin building trust as a group. Orientation stresses continuous attendance and introduces the subject. It points out the pervasiveness and power of sexuality and the worth of each person's insights and contributions.

A picture-rating exercise sensitizes persons to "their operating view of sex." Responses are shared, discussed, and noted.

Finally, the Sexual Awareness Inventory is administered. The scoring may be done in the group, or at home with parents, and discussed.<sup>59</sup> Its purpose is to identify "issues, questions, intentions, and hidden agendas."

A short group meditation/reading on creation or sensuality closes the meeting.

Session II reviews information on anatomy and reproduction with emphasis on its "humanizing." The unit tries to reduce anxiety of talking about the subject.

The unit begins with a showing of a set of slides

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., B, p. 3; C, "Sample Youth Letter."

<sup>59</sup>Sexuality: An Awareness-Attitude Inventory (Minneapolis: Sacred Design Associates, 1968). The commentary on the total scores has been modified, primarily away from the original judgmental tones.

(compiled from many sources) and a commentary informally read. Anatomy slides are line drawings; conception, fetal development and birth are included, but contraception is not. Several lead teachers have displays of devices, however.<sup>60</sup> Small groups are used to supply 73 definitions of terms, concepts, and anatomical parts. Discussion and questions are encouraged. Blank cards for questions, issues and goals for the course are used to elicit additional input.

Following the showing of a short film, "The Rose," small groups encourage sharing of feelings about reproduction, childbirth and love. The closing "celebration" allows full-group debriefing and sharing. Another meditation is read (responsively) and the song "He's Got the Whole World" is sung.

Session III deals with "the process of sexual intimacy" and "methods of communicating love and affection."

A review of progress so far in the course introduces an invitation for a further airing of questions.

The teacher presents Duvall's twelve stages of "Love Development."<sup>61</sup> It must be noted that "other sex, same age" is implicitly presented as normative (love for children and "brotherly love" are higher on the scale). The

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<sup>60</sup>From a personal conversation with Lois Seifert, a leader in the Task Force, July 1, 1974.

<sup>61</sup>Evelyn Millis Duvall, Love and the Facts of Life (New York: Association Press, 1964), pp. 29-39.



remainder of the course, students are told, deals with this stage. A "Progression of Intimacy" using "sexual communication symbols" is developed by small groups. Appropriate types of sexual communication are juxtaposed with given stages of intimate relationships. The progressions are each listed and compared by the total group.

It is here that the remaining two sessions are planned by "the Lead Teacher and Faculty (and participants?)" using the thirty optional resources provided.

The options for the remaining time fall roughly into eight categories: intimacy and sexual expression, masculinity/femininity, love and its communication, value clarification, contraception, parental relationship, marriage, and Christian tradition. The resources are almost entirely relational in character, heavily emphasizing communication skills and personal interaction.

The first group of options includes four ways of using the film, "The Party" (Paulist Production film) to reflect on the degrees and areas of intimacy and appropriate sexual expression.<sup>62</sup> A fifth resource is designed for use at the end of Session III and suggests development and discussion of pictorial representations of the feeling-level communication during the progression of intimacy experience.<sup>63</sup> Another option is an article by

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<sup>62</sup>Options 1-3, 30.

<sup>63</sup>Option 5.

Mary S. Calderone asserting the responsibility of the boy for the girl's "sexual awakening" as a person (unfortunately at the cost of diminishing the girl's sense of responsibility in the experience).<sup>64</sup> Another resource of this group is an opinion questionnaire asking participants to identify sources of eight "Cultural Models of the Meaning of Sex" and their degree of agreement with each.<sup>65</sup> A final option is a summary of Fromm's non-productive and productive "relationships to life."<sup>66</sup>

A group of six optional resources centers on masculinity/femininity.<sup>67</sup> Different exercises are designed to sharpen participants' sensitivities to the roles and what they mean. Role stereotypes in media, behavior traits and images, and self-concepts of male and female persons are dealt with and discussed.

Love, sex, and communication roughly cover the concerns of another set of exercises. The meaning of love and sexual intercourse is discussed in two options, using readings or contemporary songs as stimuli.<sup>68</sup> Role-playing and paired sharing are used in two others to develop further

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<sup>64</sup>Option 14.

<sup>65</sup>Option 24.

<sup>66</sup>Eric Fromm, Man for Himself (1947; New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1960), pp. 62-73; 82-101.

<sup>67</sup>Options 8, 10, 17, 18, 21, 28.

<sup>68</sup>Options 6, 7.

skill in communicating feelings about sexuality.<sup>69</sup>

Value clarification is the purpose of another group. Stories encourage reflection upon value hierarchies and priorities.<sup>70</sup>

The three resources dealing with contraception urge that responsible sex includes a conscious decision on contraception. None include any information on methods or efficacy.<sup>71</sup>

Parent-youth communication and understanding are the goals of another group of optional exercises. Two involve fantasizing by both generations on their sexual activities and experience.<sup>72</sup> Selective sharing is encouraged. A third option suggests parents and youth role-playing the other generation in a confrontation over behavior.<sup>73</sup>

One option suggests use of the sound filmstrip "What is Marriage?"<sup>74</sup> Another is a form in agree-disagree style on the Christian tradition about sex.<sup>75</sup>

Looking at the resources overall, it must be pointed out the lack of explicit material dealing with V.D., love-making, homosexuality, and contraception.

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<sup>69</sup>Options 16, 26.

<sup>70</sup>Options 9, 15, 19, 22, 23.

<sup>71</sup>Options 11-13.

<sup>72</sup>Options 27, 29.

<sup>73</sup>Option 19. This was also included under value clarification.

<sup>74</sup>Option 4.

<sup>75</sup>Option 20, from Johnson.

Conversations with members of the Task Force shows them to be unhappy with the line drawings in the slide set, yet they continue to be used. It is also apparent that an "oral tradition" of views and materials not included in the formal resources has grown up. For example, kits of contraceptive devices are regularly used and the issue of efficacy is frankly discussed "as it comes up." V.D. and homosexuality are also frankly dealt with "as they come up" and terms on each area are included in the terms forms.<sup>76</sup> Of course, the adult leadership determines just how thoroughly these areas are covered and encouraged.

#### Theological Presuppositions

Perhaps the most summary statement of the theological presuppositions of this course is this one in McCallister:

To engage in a ministry with youth in the face of sexual realities is to confront the issue of personal worth, the frustrations of daily life, and the anxieties that make the soul of a person itch. If Christian nurture truly is a matter of the whole person in all of his relationships, it is clear that sex education is imperative.<sup>77</sup>

An earlier version of this course was called "Sex and the Whole Person"--which is still descriptive. Sexuality is seen as a part of human existence which is not split up into

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<sup>76</sup>Seifert, conversation, July 1, 1974.

<sup>77</sup>Guidelines, A, p. 2.

parts, some more "holy" than others. The "Basic Assumptions" share this emphasis, in this way: "Sexuality is expressed through, and is a factor of the whole person: . . . physical needs . . . feelings . . . communications of who we are . . ."78

This course also expresses the conviction of the goodness of God's creation, including the goodness of sexuality, "except when it is misused."<sup>79</sup> Once again, this is in contrast to a traditional denial and fear of sexual feelings and behavior. Sexuality is seen as part of God's plan, and derives its goodness from its createdness. Sex is "an integral part of God's gift of life" and should be accepted and affirmed.<sup>80</sup> Misuse is not explicitly defined, though content from options provided seems to imply lack of care, honest communication, and responsibility for the other as main ideas of misuse.

Sexuality Plus heavily emphasizes relationship skills and the place of sex in relationship. McCallister puts it this way: "Christian sex education involves the reality-oriented self-determination of individuals to move into relationships in a creative and responsible way."<sup>81</sup> One's life is one's own responsibility and decisions about it must be responsibly made "within one's ethical

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., B, p. 3.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 7, goal 5.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., A, p. 3.

framework."<sup>82</sup> The course writers also see the "need for a deeper awareness of the meaning of love," a meaning not restricted to romanticism or eroticism, but presumably a part of responsibility.<sup>83</sup>

Another presupposition is that sex education including theological and ethical reflection "must occur only in the face of the reality of sex in flesh and blood" and must be "reality-oriented."<sup>84</sup> Sex education "must provide contact with the full range of reality and hope for Christian becoming."<sup>85</sup> Though not stated explicitly, reality seems determined as much by subjectively interpreted experience as by "latest scientific research" as illustrated by the phrase, "reality of God in Christ."<sup>86</sup>

Though responsible sexual behavior needs reality-oriented input, it is "determined more by attitudes and feelings than by factual information." Even more decisive are relating skills and "basic value commitments."<sup>87</sup> Sexual behavior cannot be based on taboo and myth, but neither can it be based on purely behavioristic assumptions.

Ross Snyder is noted as "vividly" stating another presupposition: "Christian sexuality is against the mentality that believes man can make of sex anything he

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., B, p. 7, goal 6.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., A, pp. 2, 3.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., B, p. 3.

desires and still be free from consequences."<sup>88</sup> Consequences are not defined or clarified, yet not denied. There are limits to the meanings which can be attached to sexual acts.

A final assumption is stated: "The gospel is a positive, life-fulfilling, liberating force which stands over against pervasive cultural patterns of exploitation and abuse."<sup>89</sup> Cultural exploitation of sex is to be exposed and questioned, in the light of a liberating gospel.

In summary, sex is a part of the created good, a gift of God and is an expression of, as well as a "factor" of "the whole person." The whole person is to receive the ministry of the church, the "positive, life-fulfilling, liberating force" of the gospel. The person, a unity of body-soul-mind, is responsible as a creature for behavior and relationships with others. All need relationship/communication skills.

#### Leadership Expectations

There is a well-developed program of leadership training for Sexuality Plus. To become a "certified lead teacher," one must either participate in a review/training

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<sup>88</sup>Guidelines, A, p. 4, paraphrased from Ross Snyder, "The Ministry of Meaning," Risk, I (June-December; Geneva: Department of Youth Ministry, World Council of Churches, 1965), p. 158.

<sup>89</sup>Guidelines, B, p. 3.

workshop and serve as a "faculty" member of a complete course, or participate as a "leader-in-training in a laboratory school" with a youth/parent course. Additionally, one must co-lead two complete courses with a certified lead teacher and apply for certification.

The application asks for one's own "statement of purpose," course outline, and a record of reading in the area." The applicant also agrees to teach two courses a year. There has been considerable debate on the requirement that certified lead teachers be married, but the requirement still stands.<sup>90</sup>

Faculty members are given these "preparation suggestions." Course and preparation should be given "first claim on your time. No part-time participation will do." Careful study of basic assumptions, objectives, and content material is urged, as well as one "basic book" on "youth and their understanding of sexuality" in addition to texts. Faculty members are urged to become acquainted with the youth and parents in the course and "begin to discipline . . . thinking, speaking, and relating toward mutual communications and learning." Faculty members are seen primarily as catalysts "encouraging youth to do creative thinking, imagining, decision-making." The role is a combination of giving information, opening doors for participation, challenging,

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 11.



classifying--all from a "catalyst stance." Finally, members are urged to remember the "Christian perspective" of the course in their preparation, for there will be depth, "anxiety, and crisis for some."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., "Specimen A."

Chapter II  
THEOLOGICAL RESOURCES FOR RESPONSIBLE  
SEXUAL RELATING FROM THE THOUGHT  
OF REINHOLD NIEBUHR

Introduction

This chapter will develop some insights and understandings which will be useful to Christians concerned about relating sexually in a free and responsible way. These thoughts hopefully will be helpful to those who also wish to enable younger persons to discover and deal with their own sexuality in a free and responsible way.

The starting point of this effort is not sexuality as such, but human existence in general. Human sexuality is human, involved in all of what it means to be human. It is not an evil to be denied or avoided, nor is it autonomous, a law of its own. Neither is it a "magic" ingredient, cementing relationships like Elmer's Glue-All, or Crazy Glue. This chapter will describe an interpretation of human existence which helps give a realistic place to sexuality in human life. The insights of one theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, will be used and applied to the problems of relating to persons in a sexual way.

Niebuhr never addressed himself specifically to the problem of sex but gave it passing mention in several places

in his masterpiece, The Nature and Destiny of Man.<sup>1</sup> His specific thoughts are usually more bound by the "natural fact of sex differentiation"<sup>2</sup> and cultural inertia, than by the possibilities enabled by the freedom of the human spirit. Yet Niebuhr's profound understanding of human existence in general can lead to an equally profound understanding of the place of sexuality in human life.

Reinhold Niebuhr's ethic as it is principally laid out in The Nature and Destiny of Man is based on two presuppositions about the nature of human life: The first is that the human spirit is capable of transcending itself to perceive both its freedom in that self-transcendence and its finitude in its contingent, individual life.<sup>3</sup> The second is that human life is a unity--of "body and soul,"<sup>4</sup> of "God-likeness and creatureliness."<sup>5</sup>

To present the first in quick summary, human self-transcendence is able to perceive seemingly unlimited possibilities for the self, as well as to stand outside of its life and perceive patterns of meaning. This capacity manifests itself, in part, in the search for ever better ways to interpret its history. The self also realizes its contingent, particular, limited existence, especially in

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<sup>1</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man (1941; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., I, 282.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., I, 55, 1-3.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., I, 136.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., I, 150.

contemplating death. This two-fold perception results in a profound anxiety. The attempts to deny, avoid, protect, and escape from the self's finitude lead it to assert itself in pride (of power, knowledge, and virtue), or sensuality (drunkenness, "luxurious and extravagant living,"<sup>6</sup> or excesses of sexual expression).

#### The Human Self as a Unity

To assert the unity of the self in its finite particularity, natural impulses and urges, rationality, spirit and soul, is to make an important statement about human limitations and freedom.

On the one hand, it is to say that the "animal impulses" in human life are no longer "pure." In fact, no biological fact, no animal impulse remains the same when it is incorporated into the human psyche.<sup>7</sup> The special, unique characteristic of human existence is the ability of the self "to transcend all the natural, social and rational coherences through which it is provisionally defined and expressed."<sup>8</sup> This capacity is the basis of the radical freedom of the self.<sup>9</sup> The self is free of all the

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., I, 234.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., I, 40.

<sup>8</sup>Gordon Harland, The Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 63.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

"structures and coherences of the world"<sup>10</sup> including even all of its own functions with which it retains an intimate relation.<sup>11</sup> The self even stands above reason, able to view it from its stance beyond reason.<sup>12</sup> Our creativity is due to the fact that we are not bound by any social, natural, communal, or rational cohesion, and can stand outside and beyond them.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, to say that human existence is a unity is to set in tension with this radical freedom, human finitude: life is insecure and full of natural contingency, ignorance, and limitation.<sup>14</sup> Bodies have natural functions which malfunction or are imperfect and at best, limit life. The self is physically and emotionally vulnerable. The mind has limits of understanding. The human being is a "frail, limited creature, subject to every natural and historical contingency."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Harland, p. 67, citing Charles W. Kegley and Robert Bretall (eds.) Reinhold Niebuhr (Library of Living Theology, 2; New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 17.

<sup>11</sup>Harland, p. 88.

<sup>12</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 17.

<sup>13</sup>Harland, p. 68, citing Reinhold Niebuhr, Christian Realism and Political Problems (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 6.

<sup>14</sup>Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 178-79.

<sup>15</sup>Harland, p. 77.

One example of the way this unity of freedom and finitude is expressed is in the most "Platonic" of relationships, where the relating is on an "intellectual" level. But even this highly "spiritual" relationship must take place via the limited and contingent means of language, meaning, writing, understanding. And if meanings and understanding meet, this miracle is due less to the power of rationality than to the power of the self to transcend itself. In fact, Niebuhr's analysis convincingly shows that reason is the servant of self-interest also. Reason, imagination, creativity--all are involved in self-transcendence, but all are transcended by this capacity. It is the ability, in part, to "empathize," to "walk in another's shoes."

Another implication of this unity of the self is that the human sex impulse is not "purely animal." It is no longer bound by the natural necessity to serve only as a procreational vehicle, but is freed by its association with the free human spirit. The force of the sexual impulse

reaches up into the highest pinnacles of human spirituality; and the insecurity of man in the heights of his freedom reaches down to the sex impulse as an instrument of compensation and as an avenue of escape.<sup>16</sup>

### Anxiety

The position of human existence between radical

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<sup>16</sup>Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 236.

freedom and contingency is hardly a secure position. The human is

a child of nature, subject to its vicissitudes, compelled by its necessities, driven by its impulses, and confined within the brevity of the years. . . .<sup>17</sup>

Thus human life is "perilously insecure," existing at the junction of nature and transcendence over nature, of necessity and freedom. While indeterminately free in spirit, the self does not possess within itself the basis of its own life. The self seeks to overcome this insecurity by trampling on other life, destroying "the harmony of creation," the relatedness of life to life.<sup>18</sup>

Human life exists in the paradoxical situation of finiteness and freedom, limited and limitless, free and bound. The human self responds with anxiety.<sup>19</sup> We as persons are anxious to "realize the indeterminate possibilities" of freedom and at the same time anxious to overcome or hide the contingencies of a creaturely existence.<sup>20</sup> We are anxious because our life is limited and dependent and yet not so limited that we do not realize this limitedness. We are also anxious because we do not know the limits to our possibilities.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., I, 3.

<sup>18</sup>Harland, p. 77.

<sup>19</sup>Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 182.

<sup>20</sup>Harland, p. 78.

<sup>21</sup>Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 183.

Niebuhr calls this inclination, this desire to seek security at the expense of other life or to hide contingency, sin.<sup>22</sup> This inclination is universal and a contradiction to essential human nature.<sup>23</sup> The contradictory aspect is related to the source of the norm agape, lying as it does in essential human nature.<sup>24</sup> This universal, inevitable inclination (sin) should be distinguished from the specific actions or manifestations (sins) which arise from this first or primary sin.

#### Sin as Pride and Sensuality

The human response to anxiety is a combination of both pride and sensuality. As Niebuhr puts it,

Man falls into pride, when he seeks to raise his contingent existence to unconditioned significance; he falls into sensuality, when he seeks to escape from his unlimited possibilities of freedom, from the perils and responsibilities of self-determination, by immersing himself into a "mutable good," by losing himself in some natural vitality.<sup>25</sup>

Pride can also be identified as the "destruction of life's harmony by the self's attempt to center life around

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<sup>22</sup>Niebuhr, Ibid., I, 182.

<sup>23</sup>Harland, p. 79, citing Reinhold Niebuhr, Discerning the Signs of the Times (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), p. 38; also Niebuhr, Self, p. 18; Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 241ff.

<sup>24</sup>This will be developed later in this chapter.

<sup>25</sup>Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 186.



itself." Sensuality is the "destruction of harmony within the self" by too heavily identifying with and devoting oneself to impulses within the self which are due only partial concern.<sup>26</sup> Thus sin is seen to be both alienation and disharmony--within the self and between the self and others.

Both pride and sensuality result from the human attempt to escape from the ambiguity of being both finite and free. At first glance the two responses may seem to be alternatives. Yet in one sense sensuality is an extension of pride. Here sensuality is "an extension of self-love to the point where it defeats its own ends."<sup>27</sup> Pride and sensuality are alike in that they both are centered on oneself, one's own existence. Yet in one, the self seeks to hide finiteness and in the other, the self seeks to hide freedom.<sup>28</sup>

Pride and sensuality can indeed coincide and become entangled in each other. For example, pride can be expressed as a grasp for power and the guarantee of security for oneself. But power can be a "sense" experience akin to the thrill of flying, racing, or mountain-climbing, and so on.

Sensuality is, in a general sense, the inordinate love for all creaturely and mutable values which results

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., I, 228.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., I, 240.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., I, 179.

from the primal love of self, rather than love of God."<sup>29</sup> Not that "creature comforts" are evil in and of themselves, but if they are too valued and arise from too great a love for oneself, they must then be confronted as sensuality.

Sensuality is, in another way, one more attempt (however unsuccessful) to "solve the problem of finiteness and freedom" by hiding human freedom and becoming lost in one or more of the "vitalities" or penultimate values of the world. That is why sensuality is "never the mere expression of natural impulse" in human life--animal instincts never have this dimension of "hidden agenda" or ulterior motive behind them.<sup>30</sup>

"Sensuality" as Niebuhr uses the term, is technically correct<sup>31</sup> though, of course, he expands the meaning. Yet lately the word has begun to take on more positive meanings as bodily pleasure and sex have become more explicitly approved for public discussion. Therefore I would like to distinguish this technical usage from the more desirable sensitivity to the senses. This sensitivity, instead of

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., I, 232.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., I, 179.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, College Ed. (Cleveland: World, 1958) and Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, 2d Ed. Unabridged (Springfield, MA: Merriam, 1961). Other terms were considered for this paper, such as voluptuousness, carnality, but seemed not to carry the same connotation of devotion to the body and senses. Despair and sense idolatry were both partly accurate and in opposite senses, but not inclusive enough to capture Niebuhr's full meaning.

being associated with the destruction of harmony, is rather more related to the restoration of harmony: the maintaining of a balance of nature, mind, spirit, not the denial of the body. One can be sensitive to sense experience, to one's sexual needs, and not raise them to a position of idolatry, or lose one's freedom and transcendence. To live is to exist in the position of tempting idolatries at every turn: the denial of sexual need, the loss of oneself in its gratification, the idolizing even of balance!

Sensuality is of special interest in reflection about sexuality. Sex may be the "most obvious occasion" for the expression of sensuality but sex is not in any sense "essentially sinful."<sup>32</sup> But once the "original harmony" of nature is broken by human self-concern, the sexual impulse is a "particularly effective" means for "both the assertion of the self and the flight from the self."<sup>33</sup>

In sex, sensuality is seen to be "another and final form of self-love." It is an effort to escape this selfishness "by the deification of another," and finally, through a "plunge into unconsciousness," the escape from the futility of both idolatries.<sup>34</sup>

In sex, as in other parts of human life, possibilities are compounded by corruptions. This amazing passage

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<sup>32</sup>Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 239.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., I, 236-37.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., I, 239.

puts the situation, which approaches paradox, in its most profound way:

The sexual act thus becomes, in human life, a drama in which the domination of one life over the desires of another and the self-abnegation of the same life in favour of another are in bewildering conflict, and also in baffling intermixture. Furthermore these corruptions are completely interlaced and compounded with a creative discovery of the self through its giving of itself to another. Thus the climax of sexual union is also a climax of creativity and sinfulness.<sup>35</sup>

Niebuhr seems to imply that sexual passion is a unique form of sensuality: it "may, by the very power it develops in the spiritual confusion of human sin . . . serve as an anodyne" just like drunkenness. It is in this case a "flight . . . to nothingness."

The ego, having found the worship both of self and of the other abortive, may use the passion of sex, without reference to self and the other, as a form of escape from the tension of life.<sup>36</sup>

Though the special power "sexual passion" seems to have is not clearly identified, its uniqueness, one would expect, is due to the fact of its physiological power (unaided by drugs, for instance) coupled with its close association with the spirit of the self, in a way that drunkenness and extravagance in clothes and food do not share.

Sin does not necessarily follow from human finitude, but rather seems inevitable due to the human response to finitude, as the forms of sin were outlined above. And so sex itself is not necessarily sinful but, given our response

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., I, 236.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., I, 237.

to creaturely vulnerability, we will only rarely share moments of, shall we say, "agape intercourse."<sup>37</sup> There will always be some element of sin in our sexual relating, just as in all our other relating.

### Agape as Normative Principle

In sexual relating, as in other human relating, there is a principle which alone is able to provide ultimate guidance for our relating. Due to the height of human self-transcendence and radical freedom, there is nothing in time, nature, human reason, or any other contingency, which can serve as this kind of ultimate principle. The human spirit is simply too free to be able to make its own finiteness its own end. "The self is too great to be contained within itself in its smallness."<sup>38</sup> The term "norm" as an ethical principle is something by which actions are judged and to which they must try to conform. But it should be remembered that human understanding and formulation of even this transcendent norm is limited! The importance of human dialog is illustrated even in our search for the best understanding of this principle.

This one ultimate norm, transcending history and

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<sup>37</sup>See the discussion below on the relation of agape and mutuality.

<sup>38</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, Faith and History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 174, cited in Harland, p. 16.

finite existence, able to do justice to the height of human transcendence, is "an action in which regard for the self is completely eliminated"<sup>39</sup> or "the perfection of sacrificial love."<sup>40</sup> Yet it is not attainable in history, nor is it within the grasp of the resources of human abilities.

This normative principle "stands on the edge of history and not in history. . . . it represents an ultimate and not an immediate possibility."<sup>41</sup> "No action or decision can simply conform to agape"--"even our best efforts and achievements" fall under judgment.<sup>42</sup>

Agape as norm is not heteronomously imposed upon human nature from without. Indeed it is even present in human nature itself. The principle of agape as found in our nature is simply this:

The self is bound to destroy itself by seeking itself too narrowly, . . . it must forget itself to realize itself, but . . . this self-forgetfulness can not be induced by the calculation that a more ultimate form of self-realization will flow from the forgetfulness.<sup>43</sup>

In other words, the self "destroys itself by seeking itself too immediately."<sup>44</sup>

Yet the experience of agape is felt in a more direct way: somehow, no matter how alienated we are from others in

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<sup>39</sup>Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 287.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., I, 68f.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., I, 298.

<sup>42</sup>Harland, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup>Niebuhr, Self, p. 232.

<sup>44</sup>Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 174, cited in Harland, pp. 16-17.

the broadest possible sense, we are not able to regard the misery of our condition as "normal." Furthermore, every effort we make to give this condition the appearance of normality "betrays something of the frenzy of an uneasy conscience." Thus we see the contrast, the conflict, between what we are and some (even dimly) perceived feeling of what we ought to be.<sup>45</sup>

This "ought" perceived by all in some way is, according to Niebuhr, the claim of our "essential nature,"<sup>46</sup> experienced more as a lack than a possession.<sup>47</sup> This lack is "apprehended by virtue of the self's capacity for self-transcendence," and consequently the ought is experienced as an unfulfilled law, yet the ought of the self's essential nature is perceived "only in a fragmentary and distorted" version.<sup>48</sup>

Our essential nature, Niebuhr seems to say, is one of harmony--of heart, mind; self, neighbor; self, God. Yet even though this is perceived as a law of our own nature, we know that we do not do anything with all our heart, soul, mind, strength, much less anything truly in harmony with everyone else and God.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 265.

<sup>46</sup>Harland, p. 15.                   <sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 17, 20.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>49</sup>Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, I, 286, 292.

In summary, agape is a norm built into human existence which serves as a transcendent principle worthy of guiding and judging human activity. Agape is sacrificial concern and action, placing others' welfare over one's own. It is the only norm worthy of serving as such, since it alone is sufficiently transcendent to be beyond human possibility of attainment. Yet the norm is built into human existence, because of the seemingly contradictory truth that the self loses itself when it tries too hard to find itself, it destroys itself when it serves only itself. Thus a transcendent norm is needed.

Though this ultimate norm is historically unattainable, it is approachable, for just as humanity is limited in its achievements, so is it limited in knowledge of its limits. Thus mutuality and justice are posited as provisional norms of love in history.

#### The Provisional Norm of Mutuality

The primary context for sexual relating is in a couple setting. Most of what follows I feel is applicable to same-sex as well as opposite-sex relationships. The most important fact of human sexual relating is simply that it is human in its fullest sense: between person and person in their completeness, in their unity of nature and spirit. Sex is inherently personal, whether it be "sport-fucking" or deeply intimate communication, whether it be light touching



or a deep embrace.

The most important issue is not so much to whom one relates or what the specific expression is, from society's standpoint. For example, what might be labeled "promiscuity" could have several different meanings as behavior, though the "objective facts" of each situation might remain the same. The issue is rather the relationships involved and what a particular sexual expression means. Thus I am not going to say in what situations coitus is valid as a general rule for all. Yet, since relationships are so important, hopefully what is said is of some guidance to those who wish it.

In the realm of the one-to-one relationship, Niebuhr posits the provisional norm of agape, mutuality. The relationship between agape and mutuality is one of transcendence, similar to that between agape and justice. As Niebuhr put it, "sacrificial love (agape) completes the incompleteness of mutual love (eros)."<sup>50</sup> The relationship is "thoroughly dialectical": agape "clarifies the historical possibilities and limitations of mutuality and it contradicts all our achievements of love and justice insofar as they contain an admixture of sin."<sup>51</sup>

Mutuality is, quite simply, a relationship advantageous to each person involved, based upon principles of

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., II, 82.

<sup>51</sup>Harland, p. 13.

harmony, coherence, and mutual satisfaction of needs.<sup>52</sup> The self is dependent upon others for fulfillment, needing to be "drawn out of itself into the life of the other." Mutual love is, on the surface, a satisfactory way of obtaining this, yet if it is only calculation of "reciprocal advantages" the relation eventually will "be corrupted by resentments about the lack of reciprocity in the relationship." No relation can ever be perfectly reciprocal, due to the uniqueness of the persons involved.<sup>53</sup>

It seems paradoxical but true, that "the highest mutuality is achieved where mutual advantages are not consciously sought."<sup>54</sup> Mutual love needs constant replenishment "by impulses of grace in which there are no calculations of mutual advantages."<sup>55</sup> Niebuhr once put the relation between mutual love and agape this way:

It is precisely because mutual love has the root of selfishness in it that it lends itself so readily to a justification of egoism if it does not stand under the scrutiny of the higher ideal of disinterested or sacrificial love. . . . Agape does work as an ideal which constantly reminds us of the alloy of egoism in every mutual relation and saves us from the hypocrisy of believing that we are unselfish when we affirm the interest of another in order that he may affirm our

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<sup>52</sup>Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, II, 81-82; Self, p. 31.

<sup>53</sup>Niebuhr, Self, p. 31.

<sup>54</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society (1932; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), p. 265.

<sup>55</sup>Niebuhr, Faith, p. 185, cited in Harland, p. 9.

interest.<sup>56</sup>

Even in such a "simple" setting of one person to one person, the norm of agape transcends human effort.

### The Provisional Norm of Justice

The relationship between agape and justice is also a relationship of transcendence. Agape transcends and judges efforts of justice. Agape serves to call into question the imperial claims of competing groups, claims which otherwise would be simply an exercise in balance of power.

In the sexual realm of human existence, the principle of justice is especially applicable to the social expressions of sexual relating. The right to choose one's sexual partner under what circumstances and for what kind of expression are the broad issues usually involved. The problem of justice is illustrated by a movement like the gay liberation movement, where an effort is made for some sort of change in the laws dealing with behavior. It is expressed in the struggle for the right of different races to marry. It is expressed in the movement to make legal any sexual expression between consenting adults in private.

Sexual behavior is not usually a large-group activity, but its effects often have an influence beyond

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<sup>56</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, "Letter to the Editor," Christian Century, L (March 15, 1933), 364, cited in Harland, p. 5.

what is usually assumed. In an area involving more than two persons who share intimate friendship and sexual expression, the issues are more complex and need more rational consideration.<sup>57</sup>

First, the demands of agape obviously apply to all relationships involved, even relationships which are basically peripheral to the ones immediately considered. What are the needs of each concerned and how can each minister sacrificially to them?

Second, the conflicting needs will have to be resolved in the best, most person-affirming way possible. Would one person's involvement with a third person seriously interfere with the other person's needs at this particular time, and how?

Third, the motives need to be examined by each person: Why do I feel the need to express this relationship in a sexual way? Why would I want to block my partner's friendship and/or sexual expression with this third person? All the while, this realization must remain clear: though I try to reflect honestly about my own needs and motives, complete honesty even to myself is impossible, given the indeterminate tendency for self-deception.

Fourth, how will deep involvement with another affect relationships in which I am now involved and may even

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<sup>57</sup>Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny, II, 248; cf. Harland.

share a kind of covenant?

Finally, the witness to the community of which one is a part needs to be intentionally weighed. We are not in life alone: how will my behavior affect my community? Though, once again, the ability to predict accurately the effect of one's actions is one of those areas denied such a limited existence as ours.

Another area where principles of justice would seem to be involved is in the place of sex in the ordinary organization of human life.

Niebuhr recognizes the sin of "male arrogance" in the attempt to define "the natural law between the sexes." This "natural law" would seem to set "the primary purpose of bisexuality" as that of "procreation." And continuing,

it is not easy to establish a universally valid "law of reason" which will eternally set the bounds for the function of sex in the historic development of human personality. . . . The relation between the sexes is governed . . . by the natural fact of sex differentiation and . . . by the spiritual fact of human freedom.<sup>58</sup>

Yet his interpretation of the "natural facts" in this area seems to be more contingent than most of the rest of his analysis. It is, of course, a "natural fact that the woman bears the child" but does this indeed necessarily bind her to the child, as he says? Does it necessarily "partially" limit "the freedom of her choice in the development of various potentialities of character not related to the

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., I, 282.

vocation of motherhood?"<sup>59</sup> Is indeed motherhood the "primary function" or "vocation" of woman? The following criticism on rationalistic feminism is valid, of course, in its main thrust, but so is the acknowledged presence of male arrogance!

A rationalistic feminism is undoubtedly inclined to transgress inexorable bounds set by nature. On the other hand any premature fixation of certain historical standards in regard to the family will inevitably tend to reinforce male arrogance and to retard justified efforts on the part of the female to achieve such freedom as is not incompatible with the primary function of motherhood.<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, what are the "inexorable bounds set by nature" and who decides them? What are the limits of nature when they are so intimately associated with the free human spirit?

Finally, Niebuhr assumes monogamy is a "permanent norm." Yet the following passage contains a rather curious judgment on himself. It also provides another insight into the problem of justice in sexual relating.

The freedom . . . of humankind, makes it difficult to set precise standards for all time for any kind of relationship. . . . The sinfulness of man, on the other hand, makes it inevitable that a dominant class, group, and sex should seek to define a relationship, which guarantees its dominance, as permanently normative. There are of course certain permanent norms, such as monogamy, which . . . are maintained not purely by Scriptural authority but by the cumulative experience of the race.<sup>61</sup>

His assumption in the last quoted sentence is called into

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., emphasis added.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., I, 282-83.

question by the first two statements. And the invocation of the principle of "cumulative experience of the race" is also interesting, since the race in his estimation has not done so well in other areas of "cumulative experience."

Thus, Niebuhr's thought is seen to be conditioned and limited by his times, just as the present work will undoubtedly prove to be as well. Yet both he and I are concerned to confront contemporary, specific problems in light of our understanding of Christian experience and history.

#### Two Illustrative Issues: Touch and Integration

The two issues which are described now will serve as illustrations of the application of what has been said. Other applications will become clear as the two courses are confronted.

One of the many ways that selves use to communicate and dialog is touch. Touch is one of the most direct and concrete forms of relating. It is an expression of the self, an expression which, more than any other, uses one's contingent body to communicate with other selves. The unity of the self in its freedom and finite particularity is what makes this possible. The freedom of the human spirit makes continuums ("sexual progressions") of only limited use, as the uniqueness of a given relationship can be expressed in

many ways and with many different meanings. For example, a handshake in one context can be only a formality. In another, it can carry the release of many years of expectation, symbolizing the joining of two persons separated by time, distance, or ideology. The important thing about touch is not that a specific act carry a specific, unchanging meaning. The important thing is that it be in harmony with the self, a genuine expression of the particular self at a particular point in time.

It might be asked why the attempt should be made to integrate sexuality into one's total personality. Furthermore, is there not something "special" that keeps sexuality apart from every other part of one's life? The point of all that has been said here is that human sexuality is a part of human existence, participating in the height of human freedom and subject to the insecurities of the human spirit in its freedom and transcendence. If the principle of agape is a built-in force for harmony and integration, then sexuality is as much in need of harmonization as any other aspect of human life. If there is anything "special" about sexuality, it must be a tradition which has sensed the power of the sexual impulse to engulf the self and compound creativity and sinfulness in a way that no other human activity can do.

The capacity for self-transcendence gives the sexual part of human life its freedom from procreation needs and in



fact is the source of the meaning-structures which societies build for the sex act. Therefore in interpersonal sexual expression, the meaning-content of the experience needs to be acknowledged. Other factors which are often not reflected upon include such things as the tendency for self-deception and dishonest pretension. Reflection needs to be as honest as possible, even while realizing that complete honesty is not possible, even to oneself. Pride-of-virtue is a temptation to those who would seek to escape the dilemmas of sexual expression beyond tradition-determined roles, as well as those who assume their alternative styles are somehow "more responsible." And the sin of pride-of-knowledge perhaps awaits those who would claim the ideology of "open marriage" (for example) as final truth. The sin of pride-of-power is the temptation of those in the majority who would seek to repress "deviant" behavior in favor of safe conformity to the "cumulative experience of the race"!

Human sexual interaction is a confusion of self-interest, sensuality, pride, transcendence, creativity, limited love. There are no easy answers: if tradition is the norm (or even "cumulative experience of the race") then there is the possibility that one will abdicate freedom. Even in this situation of the choice of form over vitality, one cannot escape the same temptations. On the other hand, if alternative styles are risked, the risks of

self-interest, sensuality, pride, and deception would seem somewhat greater, though with the possibility of a new vitality of spirit, creativity, and love.

## Chapter III

### A DIALOG ON THE THEOLOGY OF SEX EDUCATION

In Chapter I, two curricula for sex education in the church were described. The Methodist course attempted to set forth its theological ground for its plan. The Unitarian one did not identify explicitly its theological stance. In Chapter II, my own attempt at a theology of sexuality was developed. There are three positions, then, on sexuality. One presented a paper which largely represents its informing theology. One made no statement of its underlying theological views. And one made no statement about a desirable method for education for human sexuality.

A true dialog would seem to be impossible under these conditions. Nevertheless, I will try to construct a conversation between the ideas on sexuality represented here.

Before beginning the dialog itself, it would be helpful to make clear some important similarities and differences between the two programs.

#### Similarities and Differences of the Programs

The similarities between the two curricula are not surprising for two liberal church-related programs.

Both courses value "love for another,"

"intimacy,"<sup>1</sup> concern and "caring for one another."<sup>2</sup> Building communication skills is an integral emphasis of both courses, though it is done in the Methodist course with specific exercises as well as in the methodology of discussion and sharing groups. Interaction and dialog among participants is emphasized in the Unitarian methodology, though the emphasis is much stronger.

Both courses are concerned that sexuality be integrated "into the total personality of the individual,"<sup>3</sup> that it be understood as "a factor of the whole person."<sup>4</sup>

These two emphases are important to the development of the communication of feeling as well as touching styles and meanings,<sup>5</sup> also highly valued by the two programs.

The goodness of sexuality is affirmed by both

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<sup>1</sup>Task Group on Sex Education in the Christian Faith, Guidelines (Los Angeles: Family Ministry Department, Southern California-Arizona Conference, United Methodist Church, 1971?), Section B, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>deryck calderwood [sic] "Femininity and Masculinity," About Your Sexuality (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>calderwood, "About the Program," p. 4.

<sup>4</sup>Task Group, Guidelines, p. 6, goal 2.

<sup>5</sup>calderwood, "Making Out," p. 1; Task Group on Sex Education in the Christian Faith, Sexuality Plus (Los Angeles: Family Ministry Department, Southern California-Arizona Conference, United Methodist Church, 1973), "Session III," p. 2.

courses<sup>6</sup> while they also recognize the possibility that sex may be "misused" or the good subverted by certain "factors."<sup>7</sup>

Sex education must be "reality oriented."<sup>8</sup> Primarily this means that accuracy of information is necessary and that there should be enough information that a relatively complete picture is presented.

Responsible decision-making<sup>9</sup> and self-determination<sup>10</sup> are grounded in accurate and complete information. Both courses seek to develop the sense of responsibility for one's own life within one's own value framework. This is the most pervasive purpose of both efforts.

Another similarity is the encouraging of reflection upon "cultural patterns of exploitation" of masculine/feminine stereotypes and sexual role expectations.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, both courses include plans for parent sessions.

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<sup>6</sup>Task Group, Guidelines, p. 6, goal 1; calderwood, "About the Program," p. 2.

<sup>7</sup>Task Group, Guidelines, p. 6, goal 1; calderwood, "Masturbation," p. 1; "Love Making."

<sup>8</sup>calderwood, "About the Program," p. 11; Task Group, Guidelines, A, pp. 2-3.

<sup>9</sup>calderwood, "About the Program," pp. 4, 6, et passim; Task Group, Guidelines, B, p. 7, goal 6.

<sup>10</sup>Task Group, Guidelines, A, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup>calderwood, "Femininity and Masculinity," p. 1; Task Group, Guidelines, B, p. 6, goal 7.

The differences between the two courses are considerable. One difference is simply in the amount of provided resources. The Unitarian effort is the more ambitious, including much original audio-visual material (recordings and film-strips). The amount of resource material in part grows out of the difference in methodology. To produce a "structured experience in sex education" requires fewer materials to cover essentially the same ground of a less-structured design which is dependent upon the differing needs of different groups.

The Unitarian course tries to represent as full a range of positive options for sexual behavior as possible, providing for as much information as may be desired. The Methodist writers, in contrast, assume in at least one place<sup>12</sup> that same-sex, same-age relationships, for instance, are but a "stage" towards maturity, not a true alternative. Information about contraception, love-making, masturbation and making out is either not given or is de-emphasized.<sup>13</sup>

Explicitly theological language is simply not present in the Unitarian material. It is adequately provided in the background to the Methodist course; actual course resources in general lack this kind of depth,

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<sup>12</sup>Task Group, Sexuality, "Session III," p. 1.

<sup>13</sup>"All concerns" which are brought up in small groups, though, "are dealt with." Personal conversation with Lois Seifert, a leader in the Task Force, July 1, 1974.

especially in the "Celebrations."

Another difference, related to methodological differences, is the adult-youth ratio in the course sessions themselves. The Methodist course recommends, ideally, that there be one adult "faculty" member for every three youth.<sup>14</sup> The Unitarian plan recommends a man-woman (not necessarily married) team lead a group of eight to twelve, though just one person can be effective.<sup>15</sup>

While both courses emphasize parental sessions, the Methodists suggest some joint parent-youth participation.<sup>16</sup> The Unitarians provide plans for the most extensive adult course (eight sessions) as well as a one-session introduction to the material.<sup>17</sup>

Full-time participation and advance registration are required for participants in the Methodist course. The attempt apparently is to concentrate the experience in a sort of semi-"cultural island," away from most pressures and influences of normal life. The Unitarians, on the other hand, spread out participation over weeks, spending as much time on each area as necessary. The door is always open for youth to leave if their needs are not being met, and for

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<sup>14</sup>Task Group, Guidelines, B, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup>calderwood, "About the Program," pp. ix, 21, 23.

<sup>16</sup>Task Group, Sexuality, "Options," 19, 27, 29.

<sup>17</sup>calderwood, "About the Program," pp. 33-40.

them to bring others.<sup>18</sup> Possibly the assumption here is that a more lasting effect will come with the continuous interaction with the culture in which the participants find themselves.

### The Dialog

In the following dialog, several issues which are important to sex education in a Christian context will be focussed upon in conversation with the position developed in the preceding chapter.

The integration of sexual behavior into the total personality is a major area of agreement between the three positions. The most important argument of the preceding chapter is just that: sexual behavior is a part of our total self, in all its glory and limitedness. Sex is not something apart from the rest of one's being. Though it would be easy to argue that western Christianity has been especially dualistic in sexual matters,<sup>19</sup> it would be evading the more significant lack of harmony I have tried to illumine. This disharmony between the parts, the urges and desires of the self is deeper than can be blamed on "tradition." The disharmony is implied even in the way the

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<sup>18</sup>calderwood, "About the Program," p. x.

<sup>19</sup>See especially William G. Cole, Sex in Christianity and Psychoanalysis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).



concept is discussed. "Integration of sexuality into the total personality"<sup>20</sup> or "understanding of sexuality as an integral part of God's gift"<sup>21</sup> both seem to imply that the integration is somehow incomplete or problematic. The emphasis upon sex as an expression of one's total self is an important step to acceptance of responsibility for one's own sexual behavior. Sex is no longer somehow fearfully uncontrollable, with its own rules, indeed a "mind" of its own.

Of course, a necessary supporting assumption, which both courses make, is that sexuality is good "as a part of creation"<sup>22</sup> or "a positive and enriching force in life."<sup>23</sup> The Methodist course qualifies its statement with the phrase "except when it is misused," but there is little explicit expansion of the meaning of "misuse." McCallister suggests "self-indulgence," "extensive experimenting with premarital sex," and "sex crimes." Problems of "personal worth, the frustrations of daily life, and the anxieties that make the soul of a person itch"<sup>24</sup> are problems that apparently would tempt one to misuse sexual energies. Only in certain options is it suggested that sexual status-seeking,

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<sup>20</sup>calderwood, "About the Program," p. 4.

<sup>21</sup>Task Group, Guidelines, B, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>23</sup>calderwood, "About the Program," p. 2.

<sup>24</sup>Task Group, Guidelines, A, p. 3.

selfishness, lack of care and responsibility for another are misuses.

In the Unitarian material, "misuse" is much more vague. There are (rare) phrases like "less desirable behaviors" used to avoid guilt associated with masturbation.<sup>25</sup> Or, "factors which, when present, destroy those possibilities" for "deeper and meaningful relations" that love making can offer.<sup>26</sup>

There are abuses of our sexuality, especially due to its incorporation into our total self. As I argued in the preceding chapter, the integration of sexual expression into the total personality does widen the possibilities for misuse due to "the insecurity of man in the heights of his freedom."<sup>27</sup> For just as sexual behavior can express one's total personhood in an intimate, committed relationship, so it can express one's demonic insecurities and failures, as rape may show.

The abuses are abuses, though, and not something inherent in the forces of sexuality. That is, sexual behavior can and is used by the self in its anxieties, and uncertainties, as McCallister implied. The Methodist course has a number of options which require participants to

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<sup>25</sup>calderwood, "Masturbation," p. 1.

<sup>26</sup>calderwood, "Love Making," p. 8.

<sup>27</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man (1941; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), I, 236.

consider problem areas and the values they hold.<sup>28</sup> Yet the way abuses and misuses are dealt with is ultimately shallow, since it lacks a clear understanding of where the abuses come from. The Unitarians' lack of dealing with abuses and their origin means that the choice of a sexual expression is also shallow, since the negative, "abuse" dimension is unexplored.

Another important consequence of the position of Chapter II is the centrality of communication. Because we as humans are limited in our perceptions of the other, we must rely on communication (indeed revelation<sup>29</sup>) by the other of who he or she is. The interests, concerns, characteristics, likes, preferences of that person are communicated primarily through word but also through gesture and behavior. As was also developed in the last chapter, our uniqueness as humans and our finitude cause conflicting needs and interests. The demands of agape through mutuality and justice are fulfilled at least in part by negotiation and compromise, where each person's needs and interests are taken seriously. This process only happens through communication. Both courses try to help develop better communication in young persons, one through specific exercises and

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<sup>28</sup>Task Group, Sexuality, "Options" 1, 2, 14, 24, 25, 15, 22, 23, 11-13.

<sup>29</sup>See Reinhold Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955).

activities, the other more through its total methodology.

Communication of personhood is not only verbal, however. It occurs through other symbols, especially touch. This idea is developed in the Unitarian unit on Making Out. Actual touching games are used, as well as touching situations read to the class, to stimulate questions and consideration of the issues involved in touching relationships. Both courses use touching continuums for reflection on the meaning of touching acts. The Methodist plan seems to encourage a more static view of the relation between touch and stages of relationship by requiring that the stages of relating and acts of touching be interfiled.<sup>30</sup> While this can be valid on an average basis, it does not sufficiently recognize or encourage the necessity for touching expressions to be "owned" by each unique person. After all, one expression or style might communicate one thing to one person and quite a different thing to another. This is, in part, what the freedom of the human spirit means.

The Unitarian materials seem to do well in affirming the finiteness of life as manifested in the concrete, specific expressions of our bodily existence. The Methodist material, on the other hand, seems to nearly ignore completely the very human, specific side of sexuality. Certainly, there is the mildly explicit childbirth film "The

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<sup>30</sup>Task Group, Sexuality, "Session III," p. 2.

Rose." But it is a "love poem" for the mother from the father and its sentimental effect is heightened by the reading (before showing) of the sweet poem that goes with it. This is supposed to "humanize" reproduction, but simply reddens the "rose"-colored lense through which sexual realities are viewed. (The death rate to mothers from pregnancy-related causes could be mentioned and discussed as a partial remedy.) The de-emphasis of V.D., love-making, homosexuality, contraception, and making out carries the price of at least ignoring the finiteness of sexuality and at worst suggesting that sexuality is best when it is most "Platonic." At the very least it indicates a certain reluctance toward explicit discussion of specific sexual concerns of young persons.

It is interesting that the Methodists, who have indicated more abuses associated with sexuality, almost ignore the specifics of sexual relating, the finiteness and the human response to finiteness and limitedness which is at the core of the abuses. The Unitarians, who are very comfortable with the specific expressions of a finite existence, give little consideration to the abuses which persons use to cope (however badly) with that finitude. It would seem that the one emphasizes too heavily the human spirit and the other the human body. Yet both claim that sexuality is part of the total personality.

Responsible decision-making, a goal shared by both

programs, grows directly out of the integration of sexuality into personhood. Responsibility cannot be avoided by invoking "instinct" or "animal urges" as a dodge. Not only is one responsible for one's sexual actions, but included in this burden is the task of making one's sexuality truly expressive of one's total personhood.

Responsibility is a two-sided concern. The first involves reflection about how one chooses to express one's sexuality. The second deals with how one relates to another. The first attempts to increase harmony within oneself; the second attempts to increase harmony between the self and others.

The central concern of responsible decision-making is how to act so that needs are met and persons fulfilled. This is essentially mutual love and justice (depending on the context), love expressed in light of the realities of limited existence, such as conflicting needs, desires, and interests. On the one hand, honest relating requires self-determination of one's own identity, values, needs, interests, and modes of expression. On the other hand, honest relating requires loving respect for the freedom, dignity, and equality of the person one is relating to. It also requires sensitivity and skill in communication.

Self-determination in the development of one's own personhood, one's values and expressions, is a shared goal of both programs. The Unitarian course, however, most

consistently follows its stated goal, by making the very structure of the plan dependent upon development of this skill. It could be argued that there is not a sufficient feeling in this material for the social forces one must respect in determining oneself. The emphasis upon individuality in this course can be carried too far, perhaps. After all, individual self-determination is a goal many adults find difficult to attain. There is good reason. Human existence is simply not that free, to be able to be truly and completely self-determined. The resentment that could develop from seeing all social and cultural forces as evil, enslaving ones is mis-directed and can lead to a strong idealism that simply is not "reality-oriented."

The Methodist course has more social input and encourages some of the same kind of social criticism. But it is dangerously close to simple upholding of social taboo and norm in the specifics of sexual behavior. There must be consideration of clear and specific theological and ethical justifications for criticism, something only partially offered in two options (15, 25). Self-determination is simply not valued highly enough to allow admission of all the options (even in principle). Participation by students in planning is limited, mostly by the structured design. The number of adult leaders could have two effects. It could increase the participation in discussions in small groups, while limiting the number of opinions. Or it could

give the impression that this subject is too important or delicate to trust young people to arrive at their own judgments.

A possible advantage of the Methodist way is in the way it lightens the burden of decision-making, which can be tremendously heavy, especially for the inexperienced. Yet lack of complete information can increase such burdens. This is a greater danger, in my estimation. It is almost a commonplace in education that things one is not ready to learn will simply be ignored, or stored for future reference. It should also be remembered that the Methodist course is designed for high school students. The Unitarian course is aimed at junior highs.

Both courses want decision-making to be based on "reality." But their notions of reality are different. "Reality" for the Unitarian writers is heavily dependent upon scientific survey of what is, with the transcendent dimension limited to consideration of human values. (Niebuhr once criticized a similar viewpoint for seeming to accept the common cold as "normal," since everyone has had it.<sup>31</sup>) "Reality" for the Methodist writers has a much richer transcendent dimension. It includes values and illuminative or revelatory experiences which, while not

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<sup>31</sup>Harland, p. 63, citing Niebuhr's reference in "Sex Standards in America," Christianity and Crisis, XIII (May 24, 1948), 65.



scientifically verifiable, are just as determinative for life. Once again, the contrast between the two courses is interesting. The behavior realities of the Unitarian course are much richer in scope, while it is the Methodist view which has the more inclusive concept of reality. It could be said that both courses limit human possibility too much. The one does so by emphasizing what is at the expense of what could be, the other by limiting the options for consideration.

One of the ways sexual behavior, especially masturbation or "self-pollution," has been controlled socially in the past was to vividly describe the dire consequences of that behavior. To control "promiscuity," the fear of pregnancy and V.D. (not to mention burning in hell!) was constantly encouraged.

The issue of consequences has not died; it has just changed direction. The Unitarian course asserts, on the one hand, "There are no automatic, inevitable physical or psychological consequences of any form of sexual behavior, but rather a wide range of possible outcomes."<sup>32</sup> In contrast, McCallister insists, "Christian sexuality is against the mentality that believes man can make of sex

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<sup>32</sup>calderwood, "About the Program," p. 2.

anything he desires and still be free from consequences."<sup>33</sup> Of course, the former does acknowledge that there might be some kind of consequences, but they are not automatically determined. The latter is not specific about the kind of consequences envisioned.

Yet the issue is real. One of the important points of my position is that the consequences of sexual acts are not automatic. Sexual relating in its broadest sense is a part of life and is not automatically limited by marriage or other commitments. Embracing and/or kissing is a common expression of caring, even in certain churches ("kiss of peace" for instance). Even those who would reserve these expressions for marriage share them with family. It seems obvious that the consequences as well as meanings of these two experiences are wide-ranging. There is also a wide range of consequences of that more intimate sexual expression, coitus. For instance, with coitus can come a wide range of personal feelings, ranging from severe guilt and shame to the ecstasy of a kind of holy experience of the self and/or the other. Physical consequences can range from frustration and congestion from lack of orgasm, to complete relaxation following orgasm, to soreness the next day from over-exertion! Pregnancy may or may not occur. It is in

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<sup>33</sup>Task Group, Guidelines, A, p. 4, paraphrased from Ross Snyder, "The Ministry of Meaning," Risk, I (June-December; Geneva: Department of Youth Ministry, World Council of Churches, 1965), 158.

the realm of meaning, feeling, and values that is of most immediate concern here.

Some of the considerations and consequences were outlined in Chapter II.<sup>34</sup> There is evidence in the literature today that on a personal level, it is indeed possible for some persons to relate to several other persons on varying levels of intimacy, including genital contact. It also appears that this can occur in the context of more than one marital relationship, or a combination of marital and non-marital relationships. The quality of such relationships can even be described as open, honest, caring, committed, and long-term or permanent. Fidelity as "sticking by" one's partner, dialog, and commitment can be most important parts of a marital relationship without sexual exclusivity. So much for foreseeable possibilities. Yet, guilt, dishonesty, lack of respect, jealousy, psychic and career destruction, divorce and even murder have been and are also possible consequences of sexual non-exclusivity. The meanings of the act differ widely. Sexual intercourse can be for some a high liturgical expression of a deeply-felt mutual commitment and union. For others it is avoided totally as the same kind of high expression of commitment to ministry. This is what it means for sexuality to be an expression of one's personhood.

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<sup>34</sup>See pp. 15-20, 23.

The issue becomes critical, however, when the social consequences of marriage relationships not based on sexual exclusivity are considered. Further study needs to be done on the function, both socially and in the Christian worldview, of the act of sexual intercourse itself. Does it indeed possess a special power, either symbolically or otherwise, that justifies its special treatment, its reservation for marriage-type relationships? What would be the social consequences of removing the connection between coitus and marriage as a social norm? Is there another act, or concept, that would be capable of providing symbolic or ritual significance for relationships of fidelity and commitment?

Some consideration has been made of such questions, but that would rightly be the subject of another dissertation. The bibliography reflects my familiarity with some of the work and views in this matter.

What is important here is that sexuality can not be made anything we desire without heed to consequences. Sexuality as an expression of the total personality carries very important consequences. Increased personal responsibility for one's behavior and its meaning, increased sensitivity to a greater part of the other's personhood, increased possibilities for expression of personal caring and nurturing, increased risk of vulnerability and hurt with attendant possibility for growth--these are some of the

consequences of what I call personalizing and "humanizing" sexuality. Kirkendall and Libby suggest, from another viewpoint, some of the kinds of very important consequences that can come with this kind of sexual expression:

Certainly the emphasis on interpersonal relationships diverts attention from the act to its consequences, but once in this position, one finds oneself in a situation which is anything but permissive. The outcome of relationships seems to be governed by principles which are unvarying and which cannot be repealed. The fiats of parents or the edicts of deans can be tempered, but there is no averting the consequences to a relationship of dishonesty, lack of self-discipline, and lack of respect for the rights of others. If one wishes warm, accepting interpersonal relationships with others, these practices are self-defeating, and no one, regardless of his position of authority, can alter this fact. Proclamations and injunctions will be of no avail. There is no permissiveness here!<sup>35</sup>

### Conclusion

So what should education for human sexuality be? Sexuality is perhaps the most physical manifestation of the differentiation, the uniqueness of each of us. If harmony is a sort of built-in norm for us, our task is two-fold, as would be agreed by both sets of writers. We must develop who we are as total persons in as much harmony with ourselves as possible, and learn how to relate to others in as responsible a way as possible. What is specifically sexual in this relationship-education is that it is done in the

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<sup>35</sup>Lester A. Kirkendall and Roger W. Libby, "Sex and Interpersonal Relationships," in Carlfred B. Broderick and Jessie Bernard (eds.) The Individual, Sex, and Society (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p. 126.

context of specific sexual expressions of ourselves and our relationships.

What is Christian sex education, then? Once again, both sets of writers are generally in agreement. Church sex education stands in a unique position to address the issues in as wholistic a way as possible. Value questions are more easily integrated with what is learned. As McCallister says, Christian sex education can deal with the whole person "in the face of the full range of reality."<sup>36</sup>

Most specifically, the best sex education for a church would seem to me to be a combination of these two courses. The methodology of the Unitarian course is excellent for developing relationship skills, while some of the exercises from the Methodist course would be helpful in sharpening them in a self-conscious way. The methodology and content should emphasize both the sense of belonging to a community with a tradition, and the sense of distance and criticism from that community. The resources of the Unitarian course provide the kind of explicit material that could be of most help in honest, "reality-oriented" decision-making. Marital status of the leaders is not as important as their skill in relating honestly, openly, and realistically with others. The environment and leaders must emphasize the balance between the freedom of the Christian, the joy of

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<sup>36</sup>Task Group, Guidelines, A, p. 4.

life, the responsibilities of loving, and the realism of  
Reinhold Niebuhr!

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